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Remarks on the generic allocation of *Pseudochelidon sirintarae*

by R. L. Zusi

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In 1968 Kitti Thonglongya described a new swallow, *Pseudochelidon sirintarae*, from Thailand (Thonglongya 1968). Its relationship with *Pseudochelidon eurystomina* of Africa was suggested to him by similarities of plumage, bill, and feet, and by comments of Peter Ames on its syringeal structure. The syringeal structure of the 2 species of *Pseudochelidon* differed enough from that of the Hirundininae to suggest at least subfamily distinction from the true swallows (Mayr & Amadon 1951, Ames, in Thonglongya 1968). Apart from the peculiarities that link the 2 species in a subfamily of their own, Thonglongya (1968: 7) commented that "the differences in size and shape of bill, the ridge between the nasal apertures, the size and strength of the feet, and the tail racquets, coupled with the geographic separation, might suffice to separate the 2 species into different genera". He nevertheless placed *sirintarae* in *Pseudochelidon* after interpreting the evidence in line with current taxonomic trends.

Recently, Brooke (1972) discussed generic limits in Old World Apodidae and Hirundinidae. He proposed raising a number of subgenera to genera, resurrected several genera (but see Phillips 1973), and named a new genus—*Eurochelidon*—in the Pseudochelidoninae, for *sirintarae*.

The basis for Brooke's new genus was a comparison by him of the skins of both *eurystomina* and *sirintarae* at the Smithsonian Institution, and measurements of both species presented by Thonglongya. Brooke made no comment on plumage differences, but he stated that "the differences in the shape and proportions of the bill and mouth show that they have very different feeding ecologies, *sirintarae* probably being able to take much larger prey and perhaps in different microhabitats" (Brooke 1972: 55). He then justified the new genus on differences in morphology, inferred ecology, and zoogeographic region. I think the following remarks cast doubt on this decision.

According to my measurements of a skin and spirit specimen of *sirintarae* and 2 skins and a spirit specimen of *eurystomina* in the Smithsonian Institution's collections, differences in bill proportion are much less marked than indicated by Thonglongya's data. In *eurystomina* the commissure is partly obscured by feathers whereas in *sirintarae* it is entirely exposed; apparently Thonglongya measured "bill from gape" and "width at gape" from the point where feathers obscured the commissure in *eurystomina* rather than from the angle of the mouth. His measurements of *sirintarae* consequently indicate a bill "more than half as wide again at gape, (and) half as long again" as that of *eurystomina* (Thonglongya 1968: 4). My measurements of the bill of 2 skins of *eurystomina*, all taken from the angle of the mouth, are

13.7, 13.5 (width) and 18.2, 18.5 mm (length). Comparing the average of 7 skins of *sirintarae* measured by Thonglongya with my measurements of *eurystomina*, *sirintarae* has a bill that is only 17.6% wider and 12.5% longer (i.e., difference as % of smaller measurement). In the 2 spirit specimens available to me (in which the rictus is not dried and shrunken as in skins), the bill of *sirintarae* is 22.5% wider.

To judge from wing measurements and appearance of the specimens, the 2 species of *Pseudochelidon* are similar in body size and the bill of *sirintarae* is thus proportionately longer and wider than that of *eurystomina*. However, the differences are less than was stated by Thonglongya and they are not greater than intrageneric differences in bill proportions found in some true swallows (*Tachycineta bicolor* and *T. albiventris*; *Riparia riparia* and *R. cincta*).

Thonglongya called the feet and claws of *sirintarae* "stronger and more robust" than those of *eurystomina*, but I can see no prominent difference. My measurements of single spirit specimens of each species suggest that by comparison, *sirintarae* has a slightly shorter tarsus, longer middle toe and claw, and similar hind toe and claw.

Thonglongya showed that the tail of *sirintarae*, excluding the elongated rachis, is shorter than that of *eurystomina* (averaging 42 and 52 mm respectively). Comparable differences can be seen in other congeners of similar size in the Hirundinidae—*Hirundo smithii* and *H. lucida*. In both comparisons the shorter tail is found in the species having long filamentous extensions of 2 rectrices (not included in the measurement).

Brooke used as one of his generic criteria the restriction of the 2 species to different zoogeographic regions. However, within the Hirundininae we find congeners with somewhat comparable distributions (*Hirundo angolensis* and *H. tabitica*; *Ptyonoprogne fuligula* and *P. concolor*). Berlioz (1970) cited other examples of congeners restricted to Africa and Southeast Asia, including sedentary forest birds (*Trichastoma*, *Pitta*). Another parallel case is that of the 2 species of bay owls (*Phodilus*)—the sole representatives of the subfamily Phodilinae. One (*prigoginei*) is restricted to the highlands of central Africa, and the other (*badius*) occurs from India through Southeast Asia to the Malay Archipelago.

Many points of difference between *sirintarae* and *eurystomina* are of the sort that characterise congeneric species in swallows or other families (*sirintarae* characters listed first): eye and eye-ring white, eye red and eye-ring pink; bill greenish yellow with black tip, bill orange-scarlet with yellow tip; rictus exposed, rictus hidden by feathers; feet flesh-coloured, feet brownish-pink; rump white, rump black; wing-lining light brown, wing-lining sooty brown; central rectrices with very long filamentous rachis, central rectrices with very short filamentous rachis. When these differences are eliminated some striking similarities remain. Both species have black heads, contrasting sharply with a browner mantle that is identically glossed with soft green in *sirintarae* and some specimens of *eurystomina* (many *eurystomina* are more purplish). The rump and upper tail coverts are blacker than the mantle and abruptly demarcated from it in *eurystomina*; in *sirintarae* the upper tail coverts are black as in *eurystomina* but the demarcation from the mantle is a transverse white band (rump). Ventrally the species are identical in colour and sheen. These detailed similarities of colour and pattern in the 2 species have not been emphasized in previous descriptions.

I must conclude that the evidence at hand does not justify the proposal of a new genus for *Pseudobelidon sirintarae*.

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Observations on the Seychelles Magpie Robin

Copsychus seychellarum

by Jenny and Roger Wilson

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The Seychelles Magpie Robin *Copsychus seychellarum* was originally found on several islands of the Seychelles group (Newton 1867), but during the last 100 years its numbers and range have been drastically reduced and Frigate Island now maintains the last surviving population.

Frigate Island is an agricultural estate, producing copra, vegetables and fruit, but it has now been developed for tourism, regrettably with an airstrip and accommodation in the same limited area which supports the greatest number of Magpie Robins. We visited Frigate from 24 May to 1 June 1976 in order to carry out a census and obtain data of the Magpie Robin population. In the limited time available, our primary aim was to estimate whether the new developments were liable to jeopardise the survival of the species. Our resulting recommendations have been submitted in typescript to the British Section of the International Council for Bird Preservation. As the report has only a limited circulation and our observations add to the previously published information on the Seychelles Magpie Robin, we feel it is worthwhile presenting them here.

FRIGATE ISLAND

The Seychelles lie 1000 km northeast of Madagascar and c. 100 km south of the equator, covering 200 km² of the western Indian Ocean. Frigate Island (4° 35' S, 55° 56' E) is the most easterly of the group. It has an area of 700 ha and consists of a granite hill rising to 125 m at its highest point. The hill falls steeply into the sea around much of the island, but there are two flat areas on the coast, locally called 'plateaux'. The most extensive of these is on the east side where the main settlement and the airstrip are situated and most of the agriculture is carried out. The second plateau, at Grand